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By REV. E. B. TEAGUE.

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By REV. SYLVANUS LANDRUM.

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THE BAPTIST PREACHER.

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THE ABSOLUTE GOODNESS OF GOD:

A Sermon by Rev. E. B. TEAGUE of Alabama.

[PREFATORY NOTE.—The author is aware that the train of argumentation in the following discourse is not new. The reasons for submitting it to the public eye are mainly connected with the thoughts contained in the last section; thoughts which, having been of great use to the author, he supposes may profit others. The preceding sections are necessary to the discussion, and as a proper introduction to the last.]

"God is love."—1 JOHN iv. : 8.

The finite cannot absolutely comprehend the infinite. Man cannot comprehend God. Our conceptions of infinite power, holiness, justice, goodness and the like, are circumscribed by the very necessity of our limited faculties. Neither, for the same reason, can we comprehend the relations of these attributes to each other, or consequently determine, previous to authoritative information on the subject, what will be the character resulting from their union. If, therefore, after the best illustration of the subject God does not appear to be love, does not appear to be the impersonation of absolute goodness, it may be because we cannot, with our limited powers, comprehend absolute goodness; if the evils which we experience in the present state be ever so numerous, they do not necessarily contradict the declaration of the text, for the connection of goodness and justice may be such, considering our relations thereto as offenders, as to occasion what we call evil.

Having thus seen that we may not hope wholly to take in the great truth of the text in all its bearings, that somewhat must be left in the province of faith, however high our capacities, however successfully the subject may be illustrated, I proceed to *attempt* some illustration of it.

I. *The constitution of outward material nature, is manifestly adapted and designed to promote our happiness.*

Take the senses as an illustration. We are endowed with sight. And the "human face divine;" the green drapery of the earth; the solemnly flowing river, as it winds through the gorge, sweeps across the plain, or plunges over the precipice; the mist-covered hills in the distance; the mountain towering into the heavens; the wide ocean; the cloud, rising many-colored and gragged against the base of the blue canopy above us, or black with winds, and burnished with lightnings; the rainbow; the sparkle of the morning dew; the western horizon converted into a great palace of gold by the setting sun; the star-spangled heavens spread out on high, are all adapted to that sight, and make it the medium of ever-varying communications of the beautiful and sublime. The stimulus of the light itself, while it conveys impressions of these outward effects to the mind, is most delightful. Who has not felt it as the morning dawns, as the sun breaks from behind the cloud, or as his rays are reflected back from the fields white with snow. We are endowed with hearing, and all nature is made musical. The human voice, which we ever hear, is attuned to notes of the richest melody. No instrument of man's invention, however sweet its tones, or varied its cadence, can compare with this instrument of God's own making. Soft, indescribably soft and touching, you hear it in the whispers of friendship, or the strains of persuasion; majestic and sonorous in the vehemence of high debate; grand, awe-inspiring and transporting in the shout of the victor or the swell of the anthem. The morning breeze, as it gently agitates the liquid air, discourses low-murmuring music. Roused into a gale, it evokes from the resounding wood a grand and lofty orchestral. The crash of the thunder, the roar of the cataract, the noise of the sea, are music all. To gratify the taste, the adaptations are no less wonderful. It is gratified by our daily food, almost hourly; by a thousand ripening fruits, which hang in beauty on the trees,

and ripen in the autumnal sun; by the sparkling fountain, as it gushes free, pure and abundant, like the "grace of God that hath appeared unto all men" from the river rock. We have the sense of smell, and a thousand perfumes are adapted to regale that sense. They are exhaled from every orchard, scattered over every field, wafted on every summer breeze. We have the sense of touch, and almost every object we come in contact with is grateful to that sense.

Shall I fail to perceive, in all these wonderful and beneficent adaptations, that God is good?

II. *We are endowed with the love of knowledge, and the means of gratifying this desire are afforded in inexhaustible abundance.*

This is true of all orders of mind and all conditions of life. New objects and new ideas arrest alike the attention of the young and the old, of the most ignorant and the best informed everywhere, at all times, in everything. The traveler never loses his interest in new countries, new manners and customs, laws and institutions; nor can a lifetime's travel exhaust the field of curiosity. The man of science is never satisfied with the extent of his acquirements, or in danger of finding the ultima thule of truth. The scholar finds that of "making books there is no end," and many an unknown volume must be left when his days are consumed, though new verdure and freshness invite along those walks he may never explore. The student of human nature has, if possible, a still greater extent and variety of view, facts and ideas, to engage his attention. He finds, even in his own bosom, a thousand problems, a thousand new phases every day. In a word, every one is learning, yet never able to come to a knowledge of half that is around him. It will no doubt constitute a part of the bliss of eternity to extend the limits of our knowledge forever. This endless study upon which we are introduced, as soon as reason dawns, and which shall occupy us for evermore in the future, is no mean part of the arrangements designed by a benevolent God to make us happy.

III. *We are created social beings, and God has met this characteristic of our nature by the most remarkable and benevolent arrangements.*

Take the illustration of natural sympathy. If a burden is to be carried which taxes my strength, a friend by dividing it

into two, and taking the one-half on his own shoulder, greatly relieves me. If it is divided into several parts, and each part borne by a friend, I am entirely relieved. So the heart, burdened by sorrow, is relieved, if some friend divide with it the burden by which it is oppressed; and it is a mysterious fact that such a burden is divisible. Natural sympathy, with which God has filled the human heart, is well adapted to this end. It thus succors us every day. To be fully conscious of this, one only requires to be absolutely alone for awhile. Ask the prisoner, who has been a long time immured in his solitary dungeon, how much the ordinary interest of our fellow man is worth, and he will testify to the greatness of this blessing.

The bestowment of speech immeasurably heightens the influence of sympathy. By it the most attenuated thought, the most delicate and transient emotion of the heart, may be conveyed as accurately to a friend, as the rays of light impress the features on polished silver in the hands of the photographer. Does joy overflow in your heart? You pour a part of it thereby into the heart of your friend. Does sorrow overwhelm you? You awaken by a single sentence, a word, or a look, in the bosom of another the sympathy you need. You possess in your own nature the spell which extracts from all around you the balm that mollifies the wounded heart.

This influence is still farther increased by the fact, that God has grouped mankind into families, by making the sexes the intellectual and moral counterpart and complement of each other. And, in general, all the parts of a family are adapted the one to the other; and this mutual adaptation and dependence perpetuates the existence of families, and produces the happiness of the circle. Need I say anything more of home than merely to utter the term? of that sanctuary of love and confidence which know not of limits? of our father's house, the place where our brothers and sisters abide? There is no other such place, save the house of God, on earth.

The force of the illustration is strengthened still by the reflection, that this grand support of human life is confined to no condition. The poorest outcast has friends: a mother, a sister, a comrade; or, these failing, an asylum in the pity of the great brotherhood of mankind, (for there are times when we all feel that we are brothers, and that no degree of degradation excludes from that relation.) No circumstances consign

the unfortunate to absolute forgetfulness. The exiled monarch of France found a resource in the hearts of his friends, when all other resources failed. The hunted Waldenses were cheered by the sympathy of the great hearts of Milton, and Cromwell, and their coadjutors, when fleeing amid Alpine snows from their burning homes, pursued by a bestial soldiery.

IV. *Have we hopes and longings and aspirations which scarcely admit of a boundary? God has provided the adaptation here also.*

These hopes, and longings, and aspirations, are not altogether unmet in this life. Even the wicked and the thoughtless, the immoral and the impious, those who never think of the hand that blesses them, compass many of their aims, enjoy much happiness for a season. This is true to a still greater extent, in such a state of society as we enjoy, of the industrious, the upright, and the virtuous, though without piety towards God. If men come, as they should, to look upon this world as merely a stepping-stone to the next, as a preparatory place to a better; if they come to understand its discipline as the very best preparation for future bliss, they still more nearly accomplish their wishes.

Let us dwell on this latter thought. Expressed more fully it is this : He who wishes to do so, may acquire such knowledge of the ways of God to man; may live in such constant communion with God; may have such conceptions of the gospel, and such a sense of his future inheritance, as shall go very far towards realizing his highest hopes and aspirations. In regard to such *knowledge* of divine things as shall be necessary to make us submissive in all things and in so far happy,—St. Paul speaks of those “Who by reason of use, have their senses exercised to discern good and evil.”—Heb. 5: 14. And St. James exhorts, “If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him.”—1: 5. Therefore we may *know* enough to be happy. If we would enjoy *communion with God*, we have but daily to ask the influences of the Holy Spirit, and to use the means of grace to “keep ourselves in the love of God.” This knowledge and this communion with God, will give us constant conceptions of the gospel, and of our future inheritance. One of

the great reasons why Christians are not happy, is, that they do not *try* to be, in the way God has directed.

But still farther, such provision is made in the eternal state, as shall absolutely meet these hopes, and longings, and aspirations. God never kindled them to be disappointed. Do I deprecate annihilation and long after immortality and everlasting life? There it is to be found. That spiritual body shall never grow old or decay, or be dissolved in dust. Do I long to be freed from sinning? There is no sin there. Does my soul pant after communion with God, "as the hart panteth after the water brooks?" There my utmost desire shall be gratified. Do I love the assemblies of the saints here on earth? There the assembly never breaks up. Do I desire, do I hope one day to behold the glories of my Lord and Master? Oh! the thought is almost too much for the heart. There He is ever gazed upon!

Is not He good—greatly good—who has devised such means of gratifying the utmost longings of the immortal spirit?

V. But God has given his Son for us!

"God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

Moreover, he gave him to be a *sufferer* for us. Says St. Paul, "It became him for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings."—Heb. 2: 10. That is, there was no other adequate way by which God could show how much he loved sinners, (among other things) but to give his Son to save them, nay, no other way adequately to do this, but to give his Son to *death*, even the death of the *cross*.

If, then, to sum up what we have thus far said, the constitution of outward material nature is manifestly adapted and designed to promote our happiness; if we are endowed with the love of knowledge, and the means of gratifying this desire are afforded in inexhaustible abundance; if we are created social beings, and God has met this characteristic of our nature by the most remarkable and benevolent arrangements; if we have hopes and longings and aspirations which scarcely admit of a boundary, for which God has also pro-

vided in this life, but especially in the life to come; and if, above all, he has given his Son—given him to ignominious death—that we might have life, is he not love? What more could he have done? What higher proof of goodness can be conceived?

VI. But I know what the reply will be to all this. “Sir, you have proved unanswerably and in many ways that God is good, that he is very good; and if it were not for a few inexplicable things which you have not touched, we would give up our opposition; we are almost ready to say we would love God, and become the disciples of his loving, pitying, dying Son. But, sir, those difficulties will not away. We do not (we wish to say it reverently), we do not understand how a God of love—infinite love—can punish a sinner infinitely and everlastingly. For the sins of the worst must be finite, capable of measure at last; and there is no proportion between the finite and the infinite. Besides, and behind all this, we do not see why a God of infinite benevolence ever permitted the hateful and destructive thing you call sin to enter our world, and so enthrall and ruin his creatures.”

Friend, I think a satisfactory solution of these difficulties is possible.

1. In the State of Alabama you have laws: to give those laws effect, you have courts of justice, prisons, pains and penalties; and every one knows that the penalties of the law must be executed, or the statutes are nugatory, and there can be no government. If the laws are not executed, if pains and penalties are not inflicted on offenders, if those pains and penalties be not of a character to be sufficiently dreaded, the effect will be, that the innocent will suffer and the guilty escape. Pains and penalties must be inflicted to the extent necessary to protect the inoffensive, and maintain the integrity and honor of the government. All this is sufficiently clear. Let it be added, that under this constitution of things, the sufferer pulls down the penalty on his own head, seeing he violates or obeys the laws as he chooses. This is so far the fact, that no one thinks of regarding him as an unfortunate, however strong his passions, however prejudicial his education.

So under the divine government. “The law is made * * * for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and

for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine."—1 Tim. 1: 9, 10. Its penalties are not inflicted because God has pleasure in the death of the sinner. "As I live," saith the Lord God, "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked man turn from his wicked way and live."—Ez. 33: 11. "He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the sons of men."—Sam. 3: 33. But they are inflicted for the protection of the inoffensive, and the preservation of the integrity and honor of the divine government. And that the penalties in this government are not too great is evident from the fact, that men are at last scarcely restrained by them. Without the influence of these penalties, they are emphatically "full of cursing and bitterness; their feet are swift to shed blood; destruction and misery are in their ways." Witness the condition of heathen lands.

If men see fit to violate the divine laws, and make themselves miserable; if they will not flee to the refuge set before them in the gospel, it is their own fault. Wherein they are weak, if they shall apply for it, and earnestly and strenuously use the appointed means, God has promised strength, having made a way of safety through the blood of his Son.

The dissipated, the profane, the unforgiving, the proud, make themselves miserable in this life often. And when such is the fact, they do not feel that they have gone by necessity in this course of ruin. No more will the damned feel that God has ruined them. As under human governments so under the divine, sin worketh death. "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lusts and enticed. Then, when lust hath conceived it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."—James 1: 13, 14, 15.

2. Suppose it were possible that we could measure the extent of the criminality of sinning against God, as the objector wishes us to do; admit, for the sake of argument, that it were unreasonable to punish a man eternally for the sins committed in this life. How do you know that the damned

will cease to sin after death? 'The probability, nay, the certainty is, that they will sin more and more. Here, they are under some restraint; there they will be entirely given over to their own vile and rebellious passions. They will sin more and more, and, as it is sin that works death, their precipitation down the steep of despair will grow more awful for ever and ever! This is the way the divine indignation works, it gives men up to themselves.

3. God foresaw that sin admitted would ruin a part of our race; would involve the death of his Son. We have seen, without doubt, that he is very benevolent; there must, therefore, be very high reasons to induce him to permit the introduction of that which it was foreseen would ruin those whom he loved; loved as his benevolence requires us to see; loved as the death of his Son was designed to show. But a still higher reason must have existed, for the permission of a thing involving the death of Jesus Christ. No one can *conceive* what was necessary to induce him to give up Christ. "He so loved him." Infinitely high must have been the reason, then, for the permission of sin, or, if another expression of the same thing is preferred by any, for leaving our first parents free.

So much for these difficulties. If every one is not removed, remember the frailty of human reason. Can we expect wholly to understand *God*? "Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty to perfection? It is as high as heaven. What canst thou do? Deeper than hell. What canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea." No, no; we cannot comprehend God; we can object nothing, however, to his absolute goodness. Then as he does all things well, so far as we can see; as he is good, and only good, so far as we can know, let us most rationally conclude that he does the rest well, and that he is love.

CONCLUSION.

Now, my hearer, I think you must be convinced. Come, lay down the arms of thy rebellion; come, learn to love God, to obey Jesus Christ, to be happy. God is love. Jesus Christ is the humanization of divine love. The saints are such only as they love. Christian duties are not a task, but a labor of love. Heaven, our home, is the world of love.

"We are journeying unto the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you; come thou with us, and we will do thee good, for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel."

"Ho! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money come; come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price!"

I must administer a caution before I sit down; for as men are prone on the one hand to find fault with God's severity, they are prone on the other to presume on his forbearance. Wrath is God's "strange work; his strange act;" and so we have to-day represented it. But as he is love, he requires love in return. If sinners will persist in rebelling against such a God, will not love such a Saviour, must we not see appropriateness in the dreadful force of the Apostle's language: "If any man love not the Lord Jesus, let him be anathema maranatha." "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little." Amen!

THE TWO WAYS:

A Sermon, preached before his congregation by REV. SYLVANUS LANDRUM, pastor of the Baptist church at Macon, Ga., on Sunday, November 20th, 1853, in the ordinary course of pastoral labor.

"Enter ye in at the strait gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be that go in thereat, because strait is the gate and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it."—Mat. vii: 13, 14.

There is no intermediate state for us in the world to come. There are but two places to which the souls of men go when the fitful dream of life is broken, to heaven or to hell. So with all the multitudes who come upon and pass off the stage of action, from age to age, there are but *two ways* in which they can go.

Men differ in their feelings, in their social positions, in their employments, and in many other ways. Enter a family, and however large, no two are just alike; in a congregation all faces differ; in business none are conducting themselves precisely alike; and yet with all these differences all the members of every family, of every congregation, of every community, are moving in but two ways towards the great

eternity. They are in the broad way which narrows down to hell, or in the narrow way which widens out into heaven.

Where do we stand to-day? In the narrow way of safety and peace, or in the broad way of trouble and danger? It is important to settle the question, for if in the broad road, there is yet an opportunity of striving for the strait and narrow way. I desire that these ways may lie out before our minds this day, their entrance, the ways themselves, and their ends.

I. *Let the broad way lie out in view*, with its groups of thronging travelers.

1. There is its *gate*. How wide! It is as wide as Adam's race. We are born into the broad way; all who have entered the world by ordinary descent from the fall until now. In this way we remain until converted to God. Such is the gate, wide as the millions of inhabitants on the whole earth.

2. See the broad *way* beyond the gate; a way suited to all the inclinations of men; to all their lusts; to all their appetites. Here is a way for the fashionable; they have their path. A way for the honorable; they have their path. A way for the debased; they have their path. I need not say the broad way is a thronged way. Its attractions are such; its width is so great; its license so full, that *many* crowd the way. So it was in the time of Noah and Abraham; so in the days of Paul, and now.

But with a little more attention, you will see the different groups which walk in separate paths over the broad way.

The covetous. Those who have an unreasonable desire after that which they have not, and dissatisfaction with that which they have; a rapacity in getting, and a rapacity in keeping. They are a company of idolaters, who have excluded God from the heart, and set up gold. Achan, Annanias and Sapphira, with a great multitude of our day, walk together here.

The infidels. Those who refusing to use their intellects to discover the truth, and becoming depraved in morals, are deeply diseased in heart. A set of miserable beings walk together in this path, proclaiming, like the poor maniac, that they are wise and well.

The spendthrifts and profligates. Those who are wasting the hard earnings of parents, and wronging innocent cre-

ditors, plunging into every turbid pool of sensualism. Here, in the broad way, is the path of these abandoned young and old men, rushing madly forward to the fearful precipice at the end, and wildly yelling, as the very fiends themselves.

The Antinomians. Those who regard the law as in no way binding upon them as a rule of life; that do what they will, their salvation is certain. Those who regard the secret decrees of God as having no connection with moral character; forgetting that God has said, that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord." These are in the broad way.

Grave politicians and wise philosophers, who have no time or taste for the "glorious gospel of the blessed God," have their path along this way.

Decent moralists, too. Men who are admired, and justly too; really ornaments to society; just, truthful, sober, regular in their habits, and industrious; men who often feel that they are far better than those who are supposed to be in the narrow way; men who make a part of the divine law their guide, that which has reference to man, but who neglect that which has reference to God. They are moral, but not *pious*. In many respects an admirable class of men. The Saviour admired such a young man, but was constrained to say to him, "*One thing thou lackest.*" So it gives us pain that these men will not go farther, and secure the "one thing needful;" but till then, we must in faithfulness point them to their path in the broad way.

The hypocrites. Men who have merely assumed religion without possessing it. As the actor on the stage imitates a character different from his own, so the hypocrite is a double man; he has one person which is natural, another which is artificial, the first he keeps to himself, the second he puts on as he does his clothes, to make his appearance before men. He assumes religion for worldly ends—to aid his business, and when it fails to advance his worldly gains, he renounces it. Or the hypocrite may be an enthusiast, who thinks himself wise and good while living in the grossest sins. Men who are children of the devil can, like their father, transform themselves into angels of light. But "by their fruits ye shall know them." Their professions may be deceptive, but their lives will sooner or later manifest their true character. They have a crowded path along the broad way.

Now, all these groups dislike each other, even despise each other; they will not walk in the same path; but all are in the broad way. O what multitudes of various characters are pressing along hour after hour, week after week, to the dark world of wailings and of woe! It is an easy way, because natural. They glide along without an effort, as upon a deep and powerful stream they move downwards by the force of the current, till plunged over the falls into the deep chasm below, to rise not again.

3. Thus they pass along the broad way to its awful *end*. That end I might call by a milder name, but at the judgment you will thank me for calling it by its right name—hell. The way is wide no longer, it narrows down into the deep, black pit. In the way different classes might have their separate paths, but now all are thrown together in the prison of despair. The moralist and debauchee, the philosopher and the profligate, the refined daughter and the son of dissipation, all banished from God, from all good society. How long? O, ask not? The great clock there strikes but one hour, and that is *eternity*.

II. But turn your eyes now to the *other way, the way of holiness*. This is the narrow way, and its entrance is the *strait gate*. The Saviour seems here to refer to a state of things around him; to private and public ways. The former was but four cubits wide, while the latter was sixteen. The strait gate may refer to the little wicket gate within the larger gate, which was quite small. There is no effort on the part of true Christianity to deceive men, in order to get them to heaven. They are told beforehand of the difficulties of the way; that it is an unfashionable way; and they are urged to count the cost.

1. Here is the *entrance* to the way of holiness. It is an absolute change of heart. A man is as his heart is; if that be in love with evil, he is bad; if it be in love with good, he is holy. The difference between these two states, is all the difference between the way of holiness and the way of sin; of heaven and of hell. To enter into life, a great change must occur, even that which is termed the new birth. The sphere of the Spirit's influence must reach man's inner nature, and so pervade it as to break the power of sin, and establish the reign of righteousness. Then he is the subject

of love, of love supreme to God, and to man as to himself. The old things of his affections have passed away, and all things of his love have become new.

This interior change will manifest itself in outward actions. The man's conduct will be the outbirth of his inner life. The master of the house having changed his views, will regulate his house in accordance with that change. His old habits, practices, and prejudices, which were the outgoings of his old love of evil, will now be laid aside for new practices, and new modes of living. By their fruits ye shall know them. "A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit."

This is the *strait gate*; regeneration, conversion. To enter in, requires repentance for sin, as sin, and unfeigned humility. It requires that confidence and reliance upon the Lord Jesus, which a little child has upon its parents. Unless we enter as little children, we cannot pass into the way of holiness.

2. But when we have entered by the strait gate, we still have the *way* before us. The Israelites were not in Canaan when they had passed from the power of Pharaoh over the Red sea.

Under all circumstances, this way demands implicit faith in the love and truth of God's promises and providences, remembering that he who never forgot Israel for forty years in the wilderness, will never desert those who love and trust him. It demands, too, un murmuring obedience. Obey every command. Begin with baptism as the outward symbol of your inward change, and go on doing "all things whatsoever he hath commanded." There are to be no little, no great commandments; all have the signature of the eternal God. When evils are presented, they must be resisted; when appetites and passions clamor, they must be denied. Along this narrow way the measure of duty is piety to God and duty to man. The whole outward man must be a medium for showing that the inner man has been baptized in the spirit of love and holiness.

The narrow way leads between narrow and pointed rocks, over mountains, and along the vale of sorrow, bereavement, and death. It is a narrow way indeed. Still, I should not tell all the truth, if I did not say that there are pleasant things

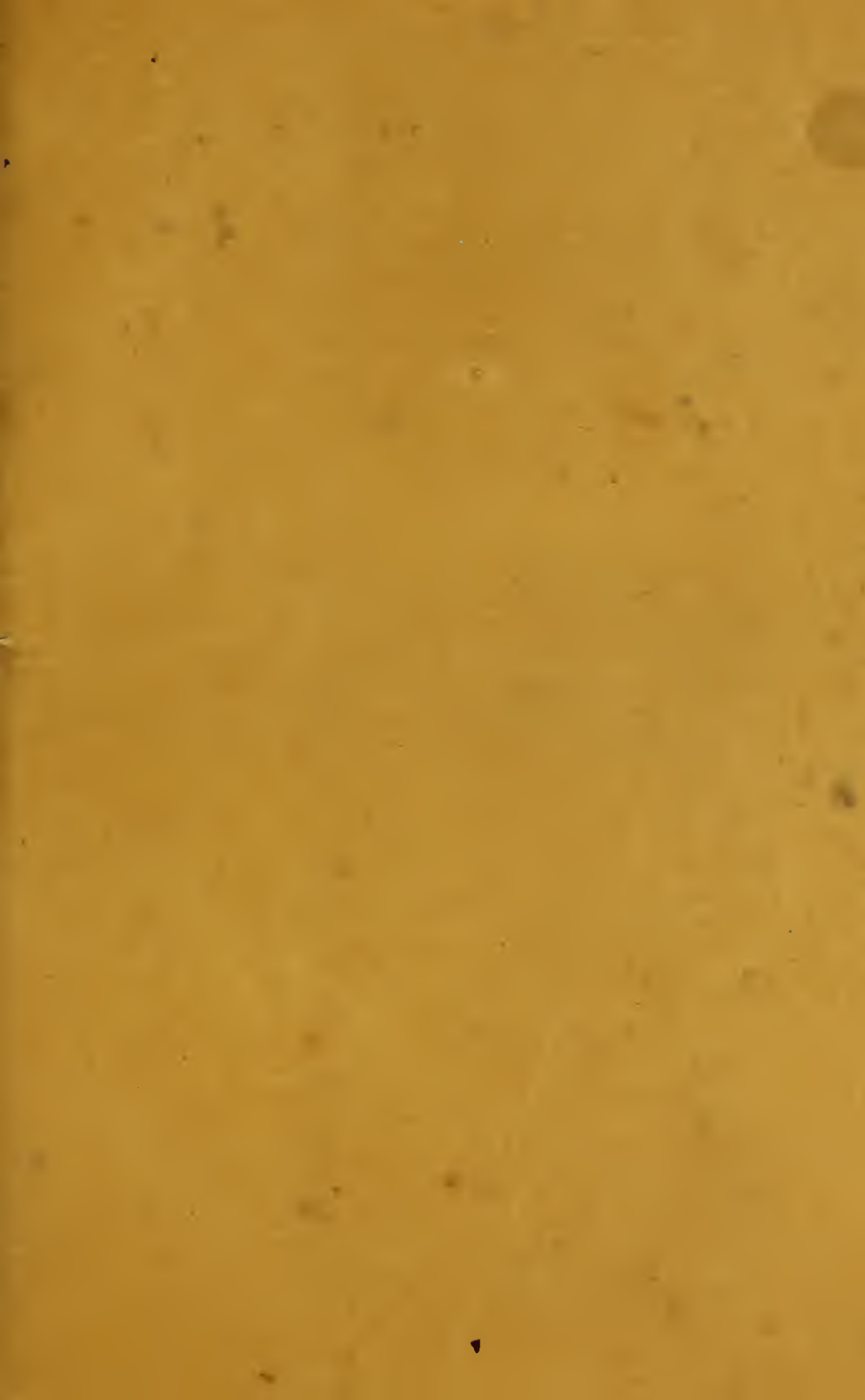
in this way. When the heart is right, there is peace. To walk in the narrow way is to live. A man really lives as he loves, and in this *way* his love is ever increasing both to God and man. It is a way of happiness, since we are happy as we are holy.

Because, however, the gate is strait and the way narrow, there are but few that find it. Few indeed, compared with the multitudes who throng the broad way. How many neglect it altogether, living only for the present. How many rest in mere forms of godliness, knowing nothing of the internal power of faith in the Lord. And how very unworthy that view of religion, which supposes that mere externals constitute its chief requirements!

3. Like the broad way, the narrow way has its *end*. It is then narrow no more, but widens out into the love of God, and all the glory of heaven. How blissful the first hour after entering heaven! That single hour after death will more than repay the Christian for all the sorrows of his earthly pilgrimage. Temptations will then be over; the defilements of sin washed away; no more affection for evil. The soul now swims in love. God is near, visible! Angels are on every hand; the patriarchs and prophets present their congratulations; the apostles instruct in the new and glorious mysteries of eternity; and the Lamb himself leads his redeemed to visions of enrapturing beauty, and fills them with thrilling love!

The application of this subject is found in the words with which the text opens, "Enter in." Dear hearers, will you enter in at the strait gate? This is your first, your great duty. The subject is fairly before you; life and death are presented; the two only ways in which you can possibly go to eternity lie out before you. Choose this day in which you will walk. Will you take the broad road, because it is wide and easy, and reject the narrow way, because it is narrow and difficult? Would you go to the gallows, because the way is smooth, and reject the presidency of these United States, because the way to the White House might be difficult? Here you would act rationally. O then, be sane about a matter of infinitely greater moment. Will you continue to act like madmen, and make sure your own soul's destruction?

Soon all the scenes of your probation will be passed: the two great ways will both terminate. What you do for your salvation must be done quickly. Let me press you to "enter in." The gate is strait, but it may be passed. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened." Pray for the gifts of the Holy Ghost, which shall bring you into holy love, and bliss, and glory eternal. Amen.



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THE BAPTIST PREACHER.

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REGENERATION—ITS POSSIBILITY—ITS ABSOLUTE NECESSITY:

A Sermon, in the ordinary course of pastoral duty, by Rev. A. S. MORRALL, Darien, Ga.

—
"Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."—
JOHN III : 3.

—
THERE is a class of people in the world, who profess to believe that the doctrine of regeneration is but the figment of man's imagination; that whether there be such a thing as being "*born again*," it is a matter of little or no consequence; that all men will be saved without reference to their characters. There are others who believe that all that is necessary to comfort them in the dying hour, is the reflection, that they have discharged their duty by joining the church, and by partaking of the Lord's supper. What a deception! what a delusion! No wonder that there is such gross ignorance in regard to spiritual and eternal things, when the soul is stupified and dead in sin. See Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, as he comes to Jesus by night, saying, "P^ro^{ph}et, we know that thou art a teacher come from God, for n^o man can do these miracles which thou doest, except God help him." Our Lord embraced this opportunity to bring to the doctrine of the *new birth*, saying, "A man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." So stupid, so blind was Nicodemus, in reference to the *new birth*, that he said, "How can a man be born

is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?" Our Lord addressed him, saying, "Except a man be born of water, and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, 'Ye must be born again.'" And the Master of Israel answered and said, "How can these things be?" It shall be my object this morning, beloved friends, to show *the possibility and the absolute necessity of the spiritual birth*. "Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

I. WHAT IS THE SPIRITUAL BIRTH, OR WHAT IS MEANT BY THE PHRASE, "BORN AGAIN?" It is certain it does not mean, as Nicodemus supposed, a second natural birth, for common sense and his own argument prove the contrary. "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?" It is very certain that it does not mean simply baptism in water; for our Lord says, "Except a man be born of water, and of the *Spirit*, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." I think that our Lord does not intend to teach in this passage, that it is absolutely necessary that a person should be born of both, for this interpretation would contradict his teachings in other parts of the Scriptures. The thief on the cross is a case just in point: he was, no doubt, born of the Spirit, and certainly not born of water; yet our Lord said unto him, "*This day thou shalt be with me in paradise.*" Here, then, we learn that a person who is born of the Spirit, and not born of water, is permitted to enter into the kingdom of God. Now a person who is born of water, (*i. e.*, who is baptized,) and not born of the Spirit, cannot be saved; cannot enter into the kingdom of God. Hence, then, there can be no intrinsic virtue imparted to us in baptism, abstractly considered; hence, then, there can be no baptismal regeneration. The phrase, "born again," does not mean merely outward reformation of character; this may have been external and yet the person be in the "gall of bitterness, and bonds of iniquity." It does not consist in a profession of religion, nor in our adherence and attachment to the church; this may be the case, and yet the person without Christ, having no hope, and without God in the world. It does not consist in partaking of the Lord's sup-

per; for the apostle insinuates that some may partake unworthily. He says, "He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body." Then, it must be obvious to every reflecting mind, that the phrase, "born again," is applicable only to the spiritual nature of man; that it is a change which effects and operates upon the heart, the fountain of life itself. The heart must be renovated. Old things must pass away, and, behold! all things must become new. The soul must be renewed; it must be brought back to the image of its God. This, this is regeneration. Having ascertained, then, what the new birth is, let us inquire,

II. WHAT ARE SOME OF ITS ATTENDANTS? WHAT ARE SOME OF THE EVIDENCES OF THE NEW BIRTH? There are always some points in our experience from which we can derive a certain knowledge of our state.

1. One evidence that we have experienced a change of heart is, *that we do sincerely desire to be freed from sin, and then become daily holy, as he is holy.* The ungodly, the impenitent sinner, have no such desire. They love darkness, says our Lord, rather than light, because their deeds are evil. They take pleasure in sin. They roll sin under their tongue as a sweet morsel. Now there was a time in our past history when this was precisely our case. Then we had no thirsting after righteousness, no panting after holiness, no desire to be freed from sin, but gave loose reins to our passions, lived for ourselves, and were altogether unmindful of our accountability to God,

"Till a new object struck our sight,
And stopped our wild career."

Now we can say from the heart—"for with the heart man believeth unto righteousness"—that we do sincerely desire to be freed from sin, and to be made pure and holy, we have one evidence that we are "born again."

2. Another evidence of this gracious state is, *in not being too ardently attached to the world, but willing to renounce it freely for the sake of Christ.* An apostle exhorts, "Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your minds, that ye may be able to prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God."

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Now the time was, when conformity to the world, with all its pleasures, with all its honors, and with all its wealth, was all that we desired. In short—for it is of no use to disguise the matter—we loved the world, and the things that are in the world. “We walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience; among whom also we all had our conversation in times past, in the lusts of the flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh, and of the mind, and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. But God who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sin, hath quickened us together with Christ—by grace are ye saved—and hath raised us up together, and made us to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”—Eph. ii. Now “whatsoever is born of God, overcometh the world; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.” An apostle exhorts, “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world.” And the reason he gives is most obvious. “If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever.—1 John, ii: 15–17. Can we exclaim this day with Paul, “What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.” “Yea, doubtless, I counted all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ, my Lord.” If this is our experience, we have another evidence that we are “born again,” even in the renunciation of the world.

3. *Sincere love to Christ* is another evidence of a change of heart. We have, on a former occasion, spoken at length on this point; but a passing remark may not be amiss. To the man whose heart has not been enlightened by grace divine; Christ is like a root out of a dry ground; he has no form nor comeliness; and there is no beauty in him that he would desire him. But the soul that is “born again,” that regenerated by the Spirit of grace, can exclaim, “He is the chief among ten thousands, and the one altogether lovely.” “Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none on earth that I desire beside thee.” And with Peter

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he can say, "Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee." And with Doddridge he can burst forth with songs of praise :

"Do not I love thee, O my Lord ?

Behold my heart, and see ;
And turn each cursed idol out
That dares to rival thee.

Do not I love thee from my soul ?

Then let me nothing love ;
Dead be my heart to every joy,
Where Jesus cannot move."

He has, indeed, supreme love to Christ. And since he loves him, he loves all who are his, of whatever character or denomination. If then, beloved friends, this is our experience, we have still another reason for believing that we are "born again."

4. Another evidence is, *the pleasure that we take in the service of God*. It must be obvious to all, that service to be acceptable to God must be rendered with a sincere love and pleasure in the service itself, and not from the fear of punishment, or the hope of reward, that will accrue to us from such a service. If the soul burns with love to God, the family altar will be erected. Like the daily sacrifice, morning and evening, that altar will be consecrated to God with prayer and supplication. Would to God that every house in our town had a family altar, and that every heart was a fit temple for the indwelling of the Holy Ghost ! If the soul burned with love to God, our weekly prayer meetings would be better attended ; the injunction of the apostle, "not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together as the manner of some is," would be promptly obeyed. If the soul burned with love to God, we should, indeed, take pleasure in his service, whatever form or character that service may assume ; for we should then feel that his yoke is easy and his burden light. Do we take pleasure in his service ? Then we have still another evidence that we are "born again."

5. Another evidence of a change of heart is, *a sincere desire to keep all the commandments of Christ*. Now the unregenerate, the unrenewed soul goes counter to all his

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commandments. His heart is not in the matter; he has no respect for the authority of the "King of kings." But when he has been brought to feel himself a sinner; when he has been brought *by faith* to view him whom he has pierced, he does not stop to parley, saying, "Can I not be saved without this?" or "Where is the utility of that?" No, no; his only question is, "*What has Christ commanded?*" Hence he goes to the word with a teachable spirit, casting away all prejudices and all pre-conceived opinions not based upon God's word, and there searches with a singleness of heart. Having ascertained what the Lord would have him to do, whether it be to pluck out a right eye, or to cut off a right hand, he confers not with flesh and blood, but the language of his heart is,

"In all my Lord's appointed ways,
My journey I'll pursue;
Hinder me not, ye much loved saints,
For I must go with you.

Through floods and flames, if Jesus leads,
I'll follow where he goes;
Hinder me not, shall be my cry,
Though earth and hell oppose.

Through duties, and through trials too,
I'll go at his command;
Hinder me not, for I am bound
To my Immanuel's land."

If this is our experience, we have another testimony that we are "born again." Having shown conclusively the possibility of a spiritual birth, we pass on to consider

III. THE ABSOLUTE NECESSITY OF BEING "BORN AGAIN." Our Lord is positive, is emphatic, "*Except* a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." "He is not a man that he should lie, neither the son of man that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" We might here, then, bring the subject to a close, and say that the authority of Jesus is sufficient, for it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away, than one jot or tittle of his

word to fail. But I ask your attention for a moment on this point.

1. *The holiness of heaven demands that the sinner must be "born again," before he can be admitted to the enjoyment of the saints in light.* Heaven is the dwelling place of the redeemed of God. "There shall in no wise enter therein anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination or maketh a lie." This is the express declaration of Scripture. Think you that the unredeemed, the unregenerated, could enjoy the society of the heavenly hosts? The very fact that they take no pleasure in the service of God on earth; that they do not enjoy the society of Christians where Christ is the theme, is an argument sufficient to establish the fact, that heaven to them would be worse than hell itself. Then, the holiness of heaven demands that

"The sinner must be born again,
Or sink in endless wo."

2. But lastly, for argument is useless in a case so plain : *The condition of the sinner demands that he should be "born again."* Now what is the character of the ungodly, as portrayed to us in the word of God? He is an alien from the commonwealth of Israel, and a stranger from the covenant of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. "The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God."—I Cor., vi. But this same apostle goes still farther than this. "And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient. Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness, full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity, whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenant breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful."—Romans i. What a dark catalogue of iniquity! Now, I believe that there are degrees in sin as well as in holiness. You may

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not be guilty of all this, and God forbid that I should charge it upon you, still, it does not alter the case. The most moral man and the most outbreking wretch will be condemned by the same law; for

“The sinner must be born again,
Or drink the wrath of God.”

A word in conclusion, and I leave this subject to your own reflections. What folly it is in man to entertain the thought that he can be saved without being “born again!” What! to be in this world “lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God!” What! to be in this world “haters of God,” and then to expect after death to dwell with God in glory! The idea is preposterous. My brethren, let us examine ourselves—examine the foundation upon which we are building—examine our hearts, our affections, our motives. Let this be a *daily work*. Then, if after such an examination you can say from the heart, “for with the heart man believeth unto righteousness,” that you have the evidence within you that you are “born again,” it is your duty, yea, your privilege, to profess Christ openly before men; to take up your cross and follow Jesus; to cast in your lot with the people of God. Our Lord says, “*Him that confesseth me before men, him will I confess before my father, and before the holy angels.*”

“Now the God of peace that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”

CHRIST'S DISCOURSE WITH NICODEMUS.

A NOTE BY THE EDITOR.

Conflicts are not the less terrific because the more common. Those that occur between conscience and misconceived interests are often tragic, and they are of daily occurrence by myriads. Within the range of our own reading, none of deeper interest has presented itself to our mind than that of Nicodemus. This single circumstance therefore is sufficient, in our views of the case, to invest this narrative with overwhelming importance.

Further. This is the first reported sermon of our Lord. He had preached many since his baptism, but no one of them is committed to record. The present is supposed to be only an abridgement of what was actually said, and even this was omitted by all the other evangelists, and never committed to writing till in the last days of this oldest apostle; at least one generation, some are of the opinion two generations after the death of Christ. John may have been present and heard it; or he may have received it from the lips of Christ; or he may have written it by inspiration alone. The second is the most probable supposition. John in his long ministry may have repeated it, and expatiated upon it thousands of times; and now in his supplemental gospel, just before he dies, he leaves it on record for the next and all following generations. This circumstance, too, is sufficient to invest the narrative with the deepest interest.

The whole conversation naturally divides itself into two parts: what Nicodemus said to Christ, and what Christ said to Nicodemus.

I. What Nicodemus said to Christ. And this divides itself again into two distinct departments, viz: his *concessions* and his *cavils*.

First. His *concessions*. "Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God, for no man can do the miracles that thou doest, except God be with him." Thus he admits in full the claims of Jesus to the dignity of Messiah, and his own consequent obligation to submit to his authority. Is it possible that he understood the purport of his own conces-

sions? Yes, fully. Why not? Nicodemus was probably an old man; one of his cavils implies it. But if he was not, he was old enough and sufficiently elevated in rank to justify the claims we yield to him. He could not be so ignorant as not to know what had been occurring with the most public notoriety for the last thirty years. He knew of the calamity of Zachariah, and its miraculous suspension, and he possibly had heard the dying exclamation of the patriarchal Simeon. The star seen in the east, the songs of the angels, the visit of the Magi, the edict of Herod, and its inanity of effect, all the prodigies accompanying the birth of Messiah, could not but be perfectly known to him. Why known to Herod and not to him? And it is perfectly possible, and not improbable, that he constituted one of the very Sanhedrim who occupied the bench above, when only eighteen years and six months anterior to this interview, Jesus then only twelve years of age, left two days behind them by his parents, was found in the temple with the doctors, hearing and answering questions. With recent events everybody was familiar. In the presence of a thunder-stricken multitude of spectators, the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan, by his servant, John the Baptist, was witnessed by the everlasting Father and the Holy Spirit; the one in an audible voice, and the other by a visible emblem. And it is in immediate connection with the recent conduct of Jesus, in cleansing the temple of the money changers, and in preaching his own gospel, authenticated by miraculous proofs, challenging and receiving the belief of multitudes, that was made to Jesus this nocturnal visit by this distinguished doctor.

The significance of the visit is greatly increased by its being in the night. Such an act of condescension by so great a dignitary in church and State, to one who was known as the son of a carpenter, and who, thirty years ago, was found in a manger, could not have been without a cause. And yet, if he was honest in the concession with which he accosted Jesus, why did he not resign his seat in the Sanhedrim, profess his faith in Christ, submit to the ordinance of immersion, and rank himself among those "to whom was given the power of becoming the sons of God?" This is what all other honest enquirers did, and what was demanded of all who would become disciples. Not to do this was to reject the gospel, and to sink crushed under the fiery and

accumulated wrath of the Almighty. But we hasten briefly to consider

Secondly. His *cavils*. "How can these things be?" "How can a man be born when he is old?" "Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb and be born?" The last form taken by the question, unless uttered by a fool, is a contemptible quibble.

In order to a full explanation of these questions, some latitude of remark is necessary.

The only divinely inspired religion on earth was Judaism. To the Jew pertained the law and the prophets, and all that was bright and glorious in the future of the world, must come to it through them and their Messiah in his victorious reign. Nicodemus was a Jew.

The most sanctimonious sect of the Jews was the Pharisees. As their very name imported, they were separated from even the holy people, and were the wisest and the holiest of all the sons of men. Nicodemus was a Pharisee.

The highest ecclesiastical court on earth was the Sanhedrim, whose power was autocracy itself, both civil and spiritual. Nicodemus was a member of the Sanhedrim.

Probably not the first idea of spirituality in religion had ever entered into the mind of any mortal man who was a Pharisee. Between Jews piously considered, and Jews nationally considered, there was an obvious distinction. To this distinction, St. Paul who was himself a Jew, alludes, when he says, "He is not a Jew which is one outwardly," &c. But a spiritually-minded Pharisee would be as great a contradiction in terms as an honest thief, or a benevolent miser, or a drunken teetotaller. True, their law had prefigured, and their prophets had foretold, the coming of a spiritual reign of a Spiritual Prince. But their eyes were closed against the light.

The general spirit of the ancient prophets, whose writings were in the temple, and were the daily study of Nicodemus, was: "And it shall come to pass in the last day," saith God, "That I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, not after the covenant that I made with their fathers, which covenant they brake; but I write my law on their hearts, and put it in their inward parts, and I will be unto them a God, and they shall be unto me a people."

Was not God's covenant always with his people? Was he not their God from the beginning, and were they not his chosen people? But while the prophets had foretold the coming of a spiritual era, there was a constant retrogression from spirituality, down to the very time when the whole nation, especially in its "high places," was the perfection of moral insensibility and death.

The Pharisees were very religious; but the chief elements of their religion were pride and hypocrisy.

Their alms were done, not to relieve the poor, but to be seen of men. Their very prayers were offered, not to be heard of God and answered, but that men might admire. They were very strict in their religious observances. But which? They were neither "judgment," "mercy" nor "faith," but "tythes of mint, anise and cummin." Exact in trifles, which cost nothing; fraudulent in everything honest in life and in heart. "Whitened sepulchres," enclosing "dead men's bones, and all uncleanness."

Now nothing can be more natural than to suppose that a man entertaining such sentiments, and cherishing such feelings as these, would ask, "What do you mean to say Rabbi? That such a man as I am must begin life, even religious life, over again? A man of my learning and knowledge begin the alphabet! Hoary locks descend to infancy! No deductions for my experience, my years, my official distinction, my religious reputation, and that of my sect and nation! It cannot be. Hence the cutting rebuke of Christ, "Art thou a master in Israel, and knowest not these things?" This is not the language of inquiry, but of censure, cutting rebuke.

Now that which Nicodemus supposes impossible, is the very thing which Jesus affirmed could and must be. It is as though he had said, "As certainly as it is true, that unless naturally you had been generated, you could not have existed, nor seen the light, unless born;" so certainly is it true, that you cannot be my disciple, or a son of God, unless spiritually you are begotten again, and born from above.

This is the first practical principle of the New Testament. All begin with being children; children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. This is the proper clue for the comprehension of many passages with which commentators make difficulties. It was to this first principle that Jesus recurred to cor-

rect the ambitious views of disciples, when asking the way to preferment in his kingdom : " Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall in no case enter the kingdom of heaven." Jesus did not intend to tell these disciples they must be born again now for the third time. They had been born once, and re-born. Nor did he intend to use the term to signify conversion from their ambitious views. He recurs to a first principle. Little children do not aspire to thrones. Remember, that if ye are my disciples, ye are as yet mere infants. You will be men if you live long enough, but now you are mere children.

Contrary to our expectation, when we seized our pen to scribble this note, we have been betrayed into an essay in merely glancing at what Nicodemus said to Christ. We must reserve for another, or for future numbers, what Christ said to Nicodemus.

EDITOR.

SCRIPTURAL MEMORANDA.

A WISE AND PIOUS RESOLUTION.

"Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory."—Ps. lxxiii : 24.

Among the temptations which ever and anon annoy us in this our fallen condition, are a disposition to disown what really appertains to us, and to assert claims to which we are not entitled. As regards the Providence of God over us, *our part* is submission and disobedience; *his* is to direct and to command. Our depravity exhibits itself in a propensity to claim, or, in substance, to wish we had the government, while we withhold subjection to divine authority and guidance. Under this temptation the author of our text approached the verge of ruin.

"My feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped."—(2d verse.)

Let us stop a moment, and admire the wisdom and goodness of the Providence of God.

From the commencement of our being, till the instant of our conversion, were *one item* of the occurrences omitted,

our conversion might fail; and from our conversion till our death, were his restraining, guiding, upholding hand withheld in a single instance only, our apostacy might ensue. Brethren, we may each sing with the poet :

Determined to save,
 He watch'd o'er my path,
 When Satan's blind slave
 I sported with death.

And can he have taught me
 To trust in his name,
 And thus has here brought me
 To put me to shame?

His love, in times past,
 Forbids me to think
 He'll leave me at last
 In trouble to sink.

Each sweet ebenezer
 I have in review,
 Confirms his good pleasure
 To bring me safe through.

But lest I anticipate myself, I at once observe that it is the object of this address to commend the resolution of the Psalmist in our text as wise and devout. This will probably be best effected by following the statement of his feelings made by himself :

1. It had its origin in a temptation.—(3—12 inclusive.)

What did he see? The wicked in prosperity; their wickedness unpunished, and yet increased, increased, and still unpunished. He saw the righteous drink the cup of sorrow. Of his whole nation, which God had pronounced "the lot of his inheritance," "the apple of his eye," it was true they were in bondage in a strange land, while their oppressors, worshipers of false Gods, were in power. As regarded individuals, the same fact stared him in the face to whatever point he turned. His mind became "*envious*" and "*foolish*;" he began to make the same inference which wicked men have made, that there is no God, or if there is, that he does not concern himself with mortals, or that he does not govern the world righteously, benevolently and

wisely. Wicked men navigating this sea have been shipwrecked. 'The scoffers, of whom St. Peter speaks, vauntingly asked, "Where is the promise of his coming," &c. And these also, of whom the Psalmist speaks, insultingly asked, "How doth God know, and is there knowledge in the most high?" But pious Job escaped this snare, and so did the Psalmist, as the sequel shows, but it is by a hair's breadth. He grazes the rock which must have wrecked him in the ocean.

2. He seemingly *almost* yields to the temptation.—(Verses 13 and 14.)

Did these words actually escape the lips of this man of God? If they did, the narrative shows it was *without reflection*. It was a sin, if committed at all, of *surprise*, not *deliberation*. And these differ as widely as Peter's denial, and Judas's betrayal.

But possibly the thought only *entered* his heart, to be immediately expelled. Anger may enter the bosoms of wise men, but it "resteth" only in the bosoms of fools.—Ecc. iii: 9. Even human laws, with their imperfections, can distinguish between manslaughter in an unpremeditated encounter, and murder from malice aforethought.

No, he did not yield. The pillar trembled, but it stood. The darts were received on the shield of faith.

3. He carries his perplexities to the only adequate source of relief.

He does not carry them to the ears of others. Addressing the Almighty he says, (verse 15,) "If I shall say I will speak thus, I should offend against the generation of thy children." Any expression of his doubts in the goodness and equity of God, made to others, might have been mutually injurious. Nor does he obtain relief in his own reflections. "When I thought to *know* this, it was too painful for me."—(Verse 16.)

(17.) "When I went into the sanctuary of God then understood I their end."

What sanctuary was that? There were no synagogues, no tabernacle, no temple. Every place where God is worshipped is a sanctuary. The thought is as evangelical as it is poetically beautiful. "Should fate command me to the farthest verge of earth, 'tis nought to me, since God is ever

present, ever felt, in the void waste as in the city full, and where the vital breathes there must be joy."

The manifestation of the divine countenance to the soul of the devout worshiper; this is the sun which disperses every cloud, scattering every mist. Here all difficulties are solved; all cavils refuted. With a "get thee behind me, Satan," or, "thus it is written," the tempter may be foiled in every attack.

His mind is relieved. See it in the *justness of his conclusions*; the *benevolence and humility of his feelings*: and the *wisdom and piety of his resolution*.

First. The justness of his conclusions.—(18th and 19th verses.) "Surely thou didst set them in slippery places," &c.

Second. The benevolence and humility of his feelings.—(20th and 21st verse,) (and 22d.) "As in a dream thus was I grieved," &c. So foolish was I, &c.

Thirdly. The wisdom and piety of his resolution.

(23.) "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory."

The *counsel* of the Lord is to every believer what the cloudy pillar was to ancient Israel.

Are we pursued by enemies, the world, the flesh and the devil?

Valor has its place and its worth,

"The sword we have drawn we will sheathe not,

A breath of submission we will breathe not,

The scabbard is thrown where the martyrs are laid,

And the vengeance of ages hath whetted its blade."

But unless God were our defence, our defeat must be inevitable. *He is the cloud in our rear.*

Do we take up the line of our daily march? We must not stir, for we know not whither to go, except as this cloud directs us. It is *brilliant* by *night*, *dark* by *day*, can be seen by all, never deserts us, never errs.

Nor have we a silent guide in Jehovah. He speaks in his word. This is the oracle from the cloud. He speaks through his Son, in his word.

What folly to seek any other guide; folly equalled only by a non-acceptance of this. And the end of this wilderness is glory. Not an earthly Canaan, but the true rest, of which that was an imperfect shadow.



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